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Guevara, Ernesto (Che)

## Bolivian Adventure True to Diary

## The Film 'Che' Tells a Part of the Story

By VIRGINIA PREWETT



IF the legend of Che Guevara depends for survival on the film "Che!" we may expect it to expire with a whimper. Tho rarely praised and certain to please neither Che's admirers nor his detractors, the film is nevertheless worth seeing if the viewer remembers two things:

That the first part, on the rebellion and triumph in Cuba, fantichizes Che's role. And that the second part, on the guerrilla campaign in Bolivia, comes directly from Che's diary, as released by Castro.

In the Cuban episodes, Che comes over as smarter and braver than Fidel. Time and again, Castro adopts Che's superior strategies. We see Che ordering the mass executions that began as soon as Castro's army got power. We see Che pushing Fidel into Russia's arms and chiding him for "allowing" Russia to withdraw its missiles.

Che's personal responsibility for the bloodbaths cannot be authenticated, tho he certainly went along with them. His exact role with Fidel is known only to Fidel and he will never reveal it.

But the Bolivian scenes faithfully follow Che's diary. The initial successes of Che's

band are recorded. We see Che lose the Bolivian communists' support when he tells their leader that he, Che, and no other, would have military command. We see Che fail with the peasants.

In his monthly summary for April, 1967, Che wrote that he would use "planned terror" to neutralize the peasants' hostility — and get support later. In the film, after we witness the terrible suffering of the band in the formidable Bolivian forests, and the conflict among the Cuban and Bolivian guerrillas, we at last see the band using violence and brutality against the very peasants they have come to "save."

Guevara's physical suffering is shown, and at length, his psychological disintegration under extreme hardship and failure. In the diary, Guevara records how he "lost control" and "mistreated" his men on at least one occasion.

More than this, Guevara records how he beat the little mare on which he depended for transportation so severely that he "wounded" her.

All-in-all, the film "Che!" contains a truth that rises above its defects. It shows that Batista's men committed atrocities against Cubans. Yet the Castro drumhead trials and mass executions record atrocities, too. To use "planned terror" for political purposes is atrocious, and Che himself records that he did. "Che!" ends with an old Latin American

peasant telling Che and his Bolivian captors that all he wants is to be left in peace by everybody. This is not the Latin American peasants' entire aspiration. But it is basic and it is one consistently denied.